

## U.S. Attorney's Report to the District

A year ago, in my report for August 2010 (Issue # 6, available on this website), I discussed the growing threat of sophisticated marijuana grows that have been taking root on public lands in California. Last year law enforcement eradicated nearly 7.4 million marijuana plants in California. This represents a huge increase since 2006 when fewer than 3 million plants were eradicated. In each of the last four years, over two thirds of those marijuana plants were seized on public lands in this state.

As I wrote a year ago, the well-armed groups who control these operations jeopardize the safety of law enforcement and of members of the public who access public lands. The level of violence has been escalating. Last year, law enforcement in California and Oregon reported at least 11 incidents of armed confrontations or officer-involved shootings in marijuana gardens, resulting in seven deaths. Marijuana growers also cause significant damage to environmentally sensitive areas by cutting vegetation, diverting streams, leaving piles of garbage and plastic pipe, and spreading pesticides and fertilizers. Protecting and preserving public lands is one of this office's highest priorities.

In my report last August, I reported on the results of Operation Trident, a three-week, multi-agency enforcement effort that targeted large-scale marijuana cultivators in rural areas of Fresno, Tulare, and Madera Counties. Approximately half a million plants worth almost \$2 billion were eradicated during the operation. As a result of Operation Trident, this office has secured federal convictions of 65 persons since last year on various narcotics, immigration and environmental offenses.

This harvest season, together with our sister office, the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of California, and an array of federal, state and local law enforcement partners, we targeted illegal marijuana growers in the Mendocino National Forest, a vast area in the Northern Coast Range that covers over 900,000 acres spread across six counties – Mendocino and Lake Counties in the Northern District, and Trinity, Tehama, Glenn and Colusa Counties in the Eastern District. Earlier this month, law enforcement completed a three-week operation there, dubbed "Full Court Press," that resulted in the eradication of over 632,000 marijuana plants. A large number of weapons was seized, and defendants are being prosecuted in multiple counties and in the federal courts. To date, this office has charged 27 defendants with narcotics, firearms and immigration offenses as a result of Full Court Press. In addition, 51,404 pounds of trash, 211,960 feet of irrigation pipe, and 5,459 pounds of fertilizer were removed from grow sites in the Mendocino National Forest during the operation.

Dangerous and destructive drug trafficking organizations are threatening some of California's environmental treasures. With efforts like Trident and Full Court Press, we not only eradicate marijuana grows that harm our public lands, but begin to disrupt and dismantle the organizations that control and profit from these grows.